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SUBJECT: TIBETANS IN INDIA BRIEF VISITING STAFFDEL SZYMANSKI

¶11. (U) Summary: Members of the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, including the chief executive of the Central Tibetan Authority and the Dalai Lama, told visiting professional staff of the House Small Business Committee during a December 11-12 visit that although human rights conditions in Tibet remained poor, most Tibetans supported the Dalai Lama's "middle way" advocating constitutional autonomy for greater Tibet within China. The Tibetan representatives expressed appreciation for continued American and USG support of Tibetans and human rights in China. End Summary.

Dalai Lama Emphasizes Chinese Democracy and Liberalization

¶12. (U) The Dalai Lama used an audience with the visiting staff to reiterate his view of Chinese development and progress, as he conveyed to the President during his November visit to the US. Most of China's difficulties within China and abroad, including the Tibet question, would be resolved as China "opens up more" including liberalizing restrictions on religion and expression, he predicted. He emphasized that since the Tibetan community seeks only certain autonomy and guaranteed rights within China, liberalization and progress to democracy and respect for human rights in Beijing should satisfy the Tibetans' requests.

CTA Focused on US Resettlement Proposal

¶13. (U) Samdhong Rinpoche, the elected chief executive (Kalon Tripa) of the Central Tibetan Authority (CTA, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile), reviewed Tibetan exile concerns about Chinese violations of human rights and recapped the history of dialogue with the PRC since he took office in 2002. The Tibetan exile community's strategy in dialogue was to convince Beijing that the Chinese constitution accords autonomy to minority areas such as Tibet. True autonomy, however, must be granted in all the historical area of Tibet, currently divided among five provinces in China.

¶14. (SBU) Rinpoche highlighted CTA interest in the proposed resettlement of approximately 5,000 of the most vulnerable Tibetan refugees in Nepal, along with 600-700 Tibetans associated with the 1960s-era Mustang program, to the United States. Tibetans in Nepal are most vulnerable because they have no legal status, he explained, and can be returned to China. However, India continues to issue a limited number of travel documents, and the flow of refugees through Nepal to India has not stopped despite the unrest in Nepal. Rinpoche reiterated the appreciation among Tibetans for the efforts of the USG and American people on behalf of Tibetans, saying that the Tibetan cause is "dependent" on US support.

Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile

¶15. (U) Members of the Standing Committee of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, led by Vice-chair Dolma Gyari, told the staffdel that while some conditions in Tibet are improving, the people still are denied freedom of expression, movement, and religion. They emphasized that although the Dalai Lama and the CTA have accepted the "middle way" approach of seeking only autonomy within China, Beijing ignores the Tibetans' actual demands and brands them "separatists." Monks and nuns in Tibet continue to be arrested and coerced into denying loyalty to the Dalai Lama, they insisted. Although some Tibetans may admit to visitors that life is not unbearable, they continued, if Tibetans were not being repressed, the PRC would not need to station so many security and intelligence forces in Tibet. When asked by Staffdel for the source of the information on conditions in Tibet, most admitted that they had not visited Tibet recently or obtained the information from first hand accounts.

Situation Much Better in India

¶16. (U) These interlocutors and other representatives of Tibetan NGOs and agencies agreed that the greatest challenges facing Tibetans in India were the continued difficulty of owning land or business under Indian law, the poor economic prospects facing recent arrivals from Tibet, and the

difficulty of access to higher education. Nevertheless, they pointed out, educational opportunities in India were better and freer than in Tibet, and most refugees come to India for unrestricted education before returning to their homes in Tibet. Authorities at the Refugee Reception Center confirmed that in addition to education, many refugees come only to meet the Dalai Lama, before attempting the difficult Himalayan journey again to return home. However, Tibetan interlocutors cautioned, those who attempt to return to Tibet face punishment and imprisonment if Chinese authorities learn that they have tasted the religious and intellectual freedom of India.

17. (U) Delegation List:

-- Matthew Szymanski, Chief of Staff, House Small Business Committee and US-China Interparliamentary Exchange
-- Christopher Szymanski, Professional Staff, House Small Business Committee
-- Dawn Petchell, Senior Policy Adviser, H Bureau
-- LTC James Garrison, USA, Military Escort
-- Jai Nair, Poloff

18. (U) Staffdel Szymanski cleared this message.

19. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
BLAKE